

July 30, 2012 | by USCIRF

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Today, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom welcomed the State Department's issuance of its 2011 International Religious Freedom Report.

"As always, the State Department does a commendable job of cataloguing the wide-ranging manifestations of religious freedom abuses around the world," said USCIRF Chair Katrina Lantos Swett. "The next step, and real challenge, is convincing policymakers that prioritizing religious freedom through our bilateral and multilateral relationships is both a moral imperative and serves our national interests. The other challenge is convincing foreign governments to make needed improvements. USCIRF looks forward to working with the State Department in this effort to serve our common goal of promoting and protecting freedom of religion and belief globally."

USCIRF particularly commends the State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom and Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom Suzan Johnson Cook for their efforts in spearheading the compilation of this comprehensive annual report.

The International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA) requires the State Department to

undertake an annual review of every country to “determine whether the government of that country has engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom.” Any country meeting that threshold is to be designated a “country of particular concern,” or CPC, and the U.S. government is required to take action to encourage improvements in each CPC country. IRFA provides a range of possibilities for such action, from bilateral agreements to sanctions.

USCIRF urges the State Department to promptly designate CPCs and to follow up those designations with vigorous U.S. diplomatic activity to seek improvements with respect to this fundamental human right. While IRFA does not set a specific deadline for CPC designations, the law indicates that these designations should take place soon after the issuance of the State Department’s annual report since the decisions are to be based on that review.

USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission. USCIRF Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives. USCIRF’s principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the President, Secretary of State and Congress.

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